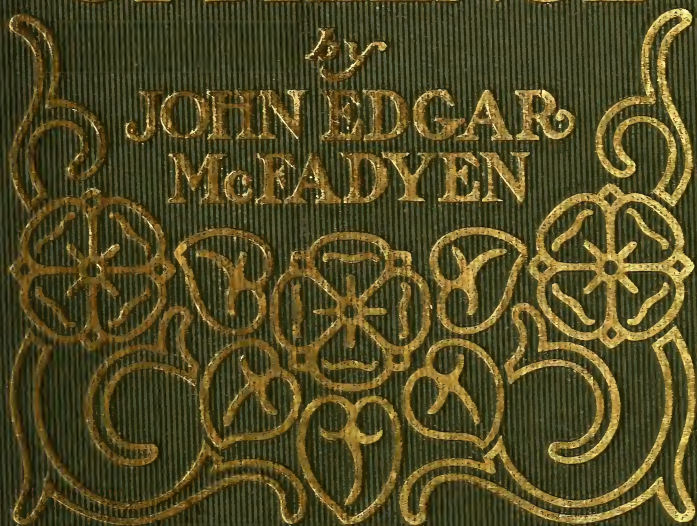


IN THE HOUR OF SILENCE

by
JOHN EDGAR
McFADYEN





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In the Hour of Silence

BY JOHN EDGAR McFADYEN,
B.A. (Oxon), M.A. (Glas.)

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BY

JOHN EDGAR MCFADYEN, B.A.(Oxon.)M.A.(Glas.)
*Professor of Old Testament Literature and Exegesis,
Knox College, Toronto.*



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IN SORROW AND IN LOVE
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
TO THE MEMORY OF
PROFESSOR ANDREW HALLIDAY DOUGLAS,
A LOYAL FRIEND, A BRILLIANT AND VERSATILE COLLEAGUE,
AND A TRUE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR,
WHO, BY HIS MANIFOLD CHARM OF MIND AND HEART,
HIS LOVE OF ALL NOBLE LEARNING,
HIS NATIVE GENTLENESS AND CHIVALRY,
HIS PURE AND BEAUTIFUL LIFE,
AND BY HIS INSPIRING, GENEROUS AND UNSELFISH SERVICE
DURING HIS TOO BRIEF TENURE OF THE
CHAIR OF APOLOGETICS IN KNOX COLLEGE, TORONTO,
WON AN ABIDING PLACE
IN THE AFFECTIONS OF ALL.

PREFACE

Like its predecessor, *The Divine Pursuit*, this little volume is a group of brief meditations on some of the things that pertain to the spiritual life. The studies are brief, because they are meant to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. Elaborate discussion does not always illuminate. The best thing one can do for a text is to let it shine in its own light.

The impulse to these chapters came from many quarters, but most powerfully and frequently from Scripture itself. There can be no doubt that the richest devotional results are reached by the closest and most sympathetic exegetical study. In these days of criticism, it is well to assure ourselves that the positive religious content of Scripture remains not only unharmed, but untouched. Its power to kindle and inspire, to comfort and

encourage is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. And it is the religious teacher's duty, as it should be his delight, to discover the life which throbs and glows in its ancient words, and so to present that life that it shall govern the mind, the heart, and the conscience of to-day.

Of these chapters, three—*The Balsam Vale*, *Like Them That Dream*, and *The Stranger at the Door*—have already appeared in *The Interior*; one—*The Place of Memory*—in *The Sunday School Times*; others in *The Westminster*. To the editors of all these magazines I am deeply indebted for their courteous permission to reprint the chapters referred to. In their new setting, may they help to sustain the hearts of any who are sad or defeated or weary!

JOHN E. McFADYEN.

TORONTO, July 9, 1902.

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Jesus Christ is the same yesterday
and to-day and forever.

TO-DAY AND FOREVER

There are times when the frailty of all things earthly is borne in upon us with a strangely depressing power. In the death of a strong man, in the coming of a birthday, in the passing of another year, we see the inexorable march of time which waits for nothing, but treads remorselessly down all that has ever been lovely or dear. The dead have been mourned and the mourners have died. The life that we loved as our own has vanished while we looked upon it—vanished and left us alone with a sense of indescribable desolation. Powerless we stand for a little upon the bank as the river of time rolls on, till one day the bank crumbles beneath our feet, and we, too, are borne on and on where millions have been borne before us, leaving nothing but a vanishing memory to those who will soon

themselves be forgotten, and be as though they had never been.

In such a mood how sorrowful must the world look to us—an ever-widening gulf of buried memories and hopes! Time has slain everything. As we look back in the quiet hour over a large tract of time, how strangely unreal seem many of the issues for which men have fought and died! The trumpet has sounded; and the cannons have roared; and the steel has flashed; and thousands have gone to a bloody grave. And now it is all quiet. The smoke has cleared away from many a battle-field; and we see, as it were, phantom combatants fighting too often for a phantom cause. But now they are gone; and the teachers and the poets and the prophets are gone; and the brave and the fair, the good and the true.

But Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, to-day and forever. He does not go. He cannot go. Lo! He is with us all the days and all the years to be, and where He is, there also shall His people be, im-

mortal with His immortality. Above all the wreck and ruin, He stands erect, with eternal sunshine upon His face. Time cannot lay its blighting hand upon Him. History has only shown Him to be more beautiful and strong. Every age confirms anew His claim, and compels men to wonder and adore Him. To Him they bring their shaken faith and shattered hopes, and He restores them to quietness and confidence. Day by day His silent influence falls upon the world with its subtle benediction. He faileth not and changeth not. Men pass, but He abides, and preserves in perfect peace the soul that loves Him until that great day. He is not one who has had His day and ceased to be. No mere memory is He, but a living, gracious and abiding Presence.

What He ever was, that He always is; and what He was, we know. We look at Him upon the hills, speaking His words of blessedness to the broken and the pure in heart. We watch Him on the lake uttering words of life from a boat to the

eager crowds upon the shore. We see Him, in His own beautiful way, restoring the woman that was a sinner to purity and God. We listen to Him as He tells to outcast people of the unutterable love of the good Shepherd, who seeks till He finds, and brings the wayward lamb home upon His shoulders rejoicing. We listen with glad awe as He calls the twelve His friends, and assures them that He spake those things to them, that in Him they might have peace and fulness of joy.

Such He was then, and He is the same to-day and forever. He passed from the sight of men to take the place which He had won by suffering at the right hand of the Father, and yet in every age men, not having seen Him, have loved Him, and looked upon Him as the realest of realities. One who knew Him not after the flesh counted all things but dung, if so be he might gain Him and be found in Him. Centuries after, another saint said: "I would I could serve Thee all the days of my life. I would I were able at least for one day to do Thee some worthy service.

Truly Thou art worthy of all service, of all honor, and everlasting praise." In very troublous times Samuel Rutherford wrote to a friend: "There is none like Him. I would not exchange one smile of His lovely face with kingdoms." And Frances Ridley Havergal, a sweet singer of a later day, wrote: "What could we do without Him in this lonely world of shadows?"

All the centuries ring with the praises of Christ, and He is as real and dear to-day as ever. Some men alive to-day have heard the sound of His voice as surely as did the Syrian crowds on street or lake; and some have felt the touch of His hand as surely as did the woman whose fever left her, when Christ took her by the hand. Strong in His fellowship and all for the love of Him, men to-day in China have gone to death in its fearfulest forms; for they counted Him worthy. He has been to them what He was to those who knew Him best—the altogether lovely.

Thus the world is not a silent burial-

ground. It is vocal with the praises of Christ. Nor has Time slain everything: it has not touched any life that was hid with Christ in God. He lives forever; and all who have ever loved Him He will lead into that glory which fadeth not away.

The way of the wicked perisheth.

THE WAY THAT PERISHETH

Most human lives lead nowhere. Not indeed for want of energy, but for want of nobleness, concentration, purpose. In indifference, if not in sin, we wander over our little span of time, for thirty, fifty, seventy years, and end where we began, with nothing attempted and nothing done; or even, it may be, further from our real destiny than when we began. We have allowed the daily burden to crush the soul out of us, instead of developing our power to bear it. Opportunities have been neglected because they were not welcomed as gifts: powers have been wasted on idle or unhallowed things: life has not been felt to be a march towards eternity. As we walk aimlessly across its waterless plains, we see no city set upon a distant hill; and we cannot hope to reach what we do not see, or at

least struggle towards in faith. So on and on we go, or rather round and round, with nothing to guide us but our own caprice, and nothing to sustain us but the empty laughter of comrades as foolish as ourselves. And one day we have to call a halt. The sun sets and we have to face the terrors of the long night alone. But our path was zigzag, and such as it was, it is lost in the sands. We did not guide our steps by the sun when he was shining in the heavens, and how shall we know our way when the thick night has come on?

Only the straight line is infinite. The only way which leads unerringly from this life to the life everlasting, is the straight way, the way of the upright. In the empty, frivolous, careless life there is nothing eternal, any more than in the wicked life, for it has nothing to do with that which is alone eternal, even God. "Thou shalt diligently consider his place, and he shall not be." "The way of the wicked perishes." You see no more of it. It dies, as die the caravan tracks in the desert.

But do we feel as Jesus did the terrible pathos of the lives that lead nowhere? To Him such a life was not merely a mistake, it was a tragedy. The crowds which sauntered thoughtlessly along the broad way, were not merely going nowhere, they were moving to destruction. The broad way was the way of ease and comfort, on which a man had room to move as he pleased without challenge, restraint or responsibility: but the end of that way was ruin. Ruin to the physical strength which self-indulgence was daily undermining: ruin to the affections which should have opened and expanded like the bud, but which a too fierce or too selfish passion had withered: ruin to the powers which an unselfish love might have wakened into beneficent activity: ruin to the hopes which had brightened the beginning of life's way: ruin to the faith which means peace. So the way of the wicked does not merely die out upon the sand; it plunges over the precipice of destruction, and hurls to their ruin those who are simple enough to travel along it.

It is hard to avoid a way so pleasantly broad, especially as it is the popular way, and has abundance of good fellowship to offer: for many there be that go in at the gate that opens on to it. And the gate is wide as the way is broad. You will not have to leave anything behind when you pass through it. Nothing has to be paid, no sacrifice made, no darling sin abandoned. All that you love you may easily take with you through this spacious gate: your vanity and your vice. But the way leadeth in the end to destruction.

Sin of every kind spells defeat and extinction. Trace its progress in your own heart—the lust for pleasure or gold or honor—and mark how it has ruined all that was best in you. Watch how those who openly or secretly defy the great laws written in every human heart, have often to hide their heads in poverty or loneliness or shame. See how the nations which have given themselves over to the lusts of the flesh have gone down before the inexorable laws which they defied. Before our eyes there are nations dying

of their "centuries of folly, noise and sin." And shall we be found to fight against God? Surely the way of transgressors is hard; for all the laws of God's world are against them. To connect ourselves consciously with evil is to evoke a Nemesis whose stroke, be it swift or slow, nothing but the all-pitiful grace of God can stay.

Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and it is entered by a strait gate through which you cannot press without leaving much that is dear behind you: friends, popularity, delights, ambitions. A lonely way it is at times: you may walk on it for days without meeting anybody, for "few they be that find it." But if it is lonely, it is sure: it will lead you through many a valley and over many a hill, but never to destruction. Every struggle with the sin that besets, every aspiration after a to-morrow that shall find us better than to-day, every longing after God, every effort to help the needy and cheer the faint or falling is a revelation in us of the will of God, and brings us further on the everlasting way. The Lord loveth the

way of the righteous, and that is a guarantee of its permanence. So they shall walk and not faint, not even in the valley of the shadow, for they shall pass through it into the brightness of His presence. No way is eternal but the way to God, and "I," said Christ, "am the Way." The feet may bleed that tread the path He trod, for it is the way of the Holy Cross. But it leads to peace and light and God.

Therefore

Search me, O God, and know my heart:

Try me, and know my thoughts:

And see if there be in me any way of grief,

And lead me in the way everlasting.

By their fruits ye shall know them.

THE MIRROR OF OPPORTUNITY

Next to knowing God, the highest task of man is to know himself. For self-knowledge is the condition of all progress, and it is for progress that we are sent into the world; or in the words of the apostle, "to press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." If to-morrow is to find us nearer that goal than to-day, then we must know what we are and where we stand to-day.

For, in the most inexorable way, what we are determines what we shall be: our character is the prophecy of our destiny. As earnestly, therefore, as we would fear to be found reprobate at the last, as eagerly as we would wish to take our place in the ranks of the redeemed around the throne of God, so earnestly and so eagerly do we need to examine

ourselves and learn what manner of men we are.

Now this is not easy. Character is a thing of infinite complexity. The subtlest influences are every day at work upon us, changing us imperceptibly from the men we were to the men we shall be when we die; and few have the skill to trace those influences, and to analyze the motives which prompt them to this, and deter them from that; with the result that we are often strangers to ourselves, and our character is as an undiscovered country. Then comes the deadliest of all temptations—for it puts the soul to sleep—the temptation to accept the world's estimate of us; foolishly happy, if a world which knows us not approve of us, and foolishly sorrowful, if that world condemn us.

But whatever others may think of us, we are ultimately only what we are. Our deepest concern is to know that, to be acquainted with the quality of our inner life. In whatever else we are deceived, we must not allow ourselves to be de-

ceived in that. We must discover ourselves, searching relentlessly till we find what we are, when stripped of all the accidents of reputation and office, and how we look in the sight of Almighty God.

That is not easy, but it is not impossible; for the tree is known by its fruits. This great word of Christ's we are fond of applying to the lives of others; but it tests our own life as much as it tests another man's. We may not be able to estimate our character as a whole, but by its fruits we may know it. Every day is crowded with unerring witnesses to the nature and direction of our inner life. We cannot open our lips or stretch out our hand, we cannot smile or frown or sigh, without revealing the invisible spirit within us. In the words and deeds which every living man brings into being every day, his spirit takes to itself an awful and irretrievable reality. In that world of his own creation he may see himself reflected with a fidelity which would often make him shudder, did he but look himself frankly in the face.

The events of our lives are not merely things that happen; on the one hand, they are revelations of the discipline through which God is searching and refining us; and on the other, our attitude to them yields us a revelation of ourselves. They are as a mirror, into which he who steadily looks cannot fail to find his own image reflected. Under a given provocation, one man will hold his peace; another will break forth into hot and unconsidered words. Both men stand as by a flash revealed. The situation has given them their opportunity to disclose themselves; nay, more, it has compelled them to disclose themselves. It was a challenge. They could not be where they were without showing what manner of men they were. The provocation did not of itself make the one man angry; it found him angry, it found him the slave of momentary passion. Thus the spirit is manifested. The veil which hid the real men from us has been rolled back. They have revealed their character to the world, but not less to them-

selves; and for the man of the impatient and hasty word, if he but saw himself as others see him, that moment might be a blessed crisis in his life—the beginning of a new career of self-control.

So every situation in which a man may be—the most commonplace as well as the most crucial—compels him to disclose himself. Whether he does something or nothing, he reveals himself. Action or inactivity, silence or speech—it is all one eloquent, impartial, ceaseless testimony to the quality of his spirit. Thus the measure of a man is his response to opportunity. As he acts, so is he. Any moment he may see himself; especially in those moments when he is taken off his guard, and thus compelled to act in character. Did we ever, in some moment of temper, raise our hand against one whom we loved? Then that vision of the uplifted hand should haunt us, till it has shamed, rebuked, chastened us; for it is a revelation of our inmost spirit, of the anger which, in its essence, is as tragic as murder—of the passion which deserves

the criminal's doom. In such a moment, our dark self stands forth with awful clearness, as if lit with a sudden lightning flash. It is ours to look and learn. Those are precious, though bitter, moments, to one who is honestly anxious to know himself. They enable us to look ourselves in the face, and to grow, through pain and repentance, into another and a fairer life.

We may also learn to measure our moral worth by watching how we behave, when the restraints, which hedge our ordinary life about, are withdrawn. With what a shock of surprise do we discover how lax good men can be on holiday! They indulge themselves in ways that at home they would hardly consider legitimate. They neglect duties which at home they seem to regard as peremptory. Their indifference to the things of God is in painful contrast to their profession and performances at home. The holiday has given them their chance to display their true self, and there they stand revealed in all the nakedness of their spiritual life.

In general, travel affords men a fine

opportunity to study themselves. The presence of other standards and often lower ideals tests the strength of principle and the reality of faith. The young man in the heart of a foreign city, and a stranger to all but the God above him, is drawn, perchance, by the subtle spell of pleasures which he would not count innocent at home. Then he learns, as he never knew before, how pitiful a figure he really is. The temptation has revealed him to himself. And woe to such an one who does not fear, with an exceeding fear, the weakness which he now must own! Well for him if, in such an hour, he remember his mother's God!

By looking upon 'what we have done, by reflecting upon what we have said, by watching ourselves in excited or critical moments, we get glimpses of that strange, unseen spirit of ours, from which all our words and deeds proceed. Little by little, we learn to know ourselves. We learn to see ourselves, not only as others see us—which is but a poor thing after all—but, in some faint measure, as we are, in His most holy sight.

Through the valley of Baca.

THE BALSAM VALE

Was ever city in all this world loved like Jerusalem? Men who had never seen it thought of it as home; and they would enter upon long and perilous ways, to gladden their hearts by the sight of it, and to rekindle their faith by standing within its gates. That city was the home of their hearts, because in some strange, high sense it was the earthly home of their God. Once, in a time of awful peril, He had defended it with His unseen army; and there, too, when the tides of heathenism were sweeping up almost to its walls, He was worshipped by later ages with an exuberant and strenuous devotion. So many an exiled heart was glad, when it heard the call to go to the house of the Lord. From the far lands those pilgrims came to the hill-girt city, which seemed to incarnate for

them the ancient purpose of their God. They came as sight-seers; but the sight they yearned to see was the living God in Zion. And oh! the thrill of it, as, spent with the weary way, they first caught sight of the walls and pinnacles.

My soul yearned, yea pined,

For the courts of Jehovah.

But now my heart and my flesh send up a
ringing cry

Unto the living God—

a cry which will surely wake a glad response in our own hearts, if we watch the dry and desolate way by which they have come. For it is no light thing—the pilgrim way. It leads across ground that is scorched by the cruel sun; there alone can the baca or balsam tree grow. Yes, the pilgrim way lies through the balsam vale, whose other name is the vale of tears. But in the end they are to look upon the face of their own great God; and they would surely reckon that all the sufferings and perils of the way were not worthy to be compared with the glory that should crown it. And if our worship

brings us less of joy than theirs, it may be because it has cost us less of pain. There is no ringing shout, because there has been no balsam vale. May those thrilling pilgrim songs do their perfect work upon us by kindling within us a sense of the glory and the joy of worship!

How the pilgrims envied the priests, whose duty was to remain forever within the solemn house of God! Thrice blessed—they cry—are they who dwell in Thy house, and sing Thee everlasting praise. Nay—answer the priests—there is a higher blessedness than that, even the pilgrim bliss which is sustained by continuous and glad surprises; the pilgrim faith which is never allowed to degenerate into monotony, but is ever kept alert by new sights and new victories, as it marches on from hill to hill, from strength to strength. The glory of God is revealed in the valley even more than in the temple: for He turns its dry places into wells of living water. Thrice blessed is the man—be he pilgrim in the valley or priest in the temple—who puts his trust in Thee.

How lovely is Thy habitation, especially to men whose home is among "the tents of ungodliness," for this is the dark background against which stand the clear figures of the pilgrim band. The accident of birth or circumstance may have thrown them there, but they are deep-hearted men whom such company cannot satisfy. They cannot live all their lives there. They must go to the house of their God and live there, though but for a day. The inspiration of that day will help to carry them across years of temptation from the men who dwell in the tents of wickedness. Worship is to them more than gorgeous ceremony. Through it comes deliverance from evil. And back through the valley they go again, not only glad, but strong. They have seen the Lord.

The pilgrim life is always the same. To-day, as yesterday, the soul that would be true to all that is best, needs the support of public worship. Too well we know how powerful are the assaults that can be led from the tents of wickedness, and how

often our armour is pierced. So one day in seven, in company with other struggling souls, we meet the Lord of Hosts, the God of the daily battle, our sun and shield. In the church of Christ, within the communion of the saints, pledged as they are to fight the good fight, our moral nature is braced again, and we taste once more the assurance of victory. For the moment, the church is home—home of our deepest heart, like a bird's nest, a soft and gentle thing, where God's Israel, like a mother bird, may lay down her young and never fear.

Every week is as a pilgrimage through the balsam vale; and as we emerge and behold the holy day and the holy city, well may we send up a ringing shout of joy. But is all life, too, not just such a pilgrimage? On we go, from weakness to weakness, or from strength to strength, according as we care little or much for the heavenly Jerusalem. But whether in weakness or in strength, it is often through a valley of tears. The deepest hearts have not felt like singing all the time.

Often, very often, it has been the tear-stained face that has been turned up in mute appeal or prayer to God. But through the tears the eye of faith will sometimes see the landscape transfigured, and fountains welling up in the balsam vale. The glory of the heavenly city sheds back a gentle light on all the way thereto. To the soul that yearns for the unclouded vision of God, the dangers and privations of the earthly pilgrimage will be transformed into blessings that break upon her barren way as the rain from heaven. Then, when the way is over, in the presence of the living God, the pilgrim will lift up his glad song, as he stands within those courts, which neither war nor storm can shatter.

The peace of all the faithful,
The calm of all the blest,
Inviolable, unvaried,
Divinest, sweetest, best.

My sins are mightier than I.

THE MIGHTY MEN

"My sins," said the Psalmist, "are mightier than I," and his words are the words of a man to whom life meant battle. Those sins of his are hideously real. Like mighty men, they beset him hourly behind and before, and he has to face and fight them as he values his life. In his most innocent and unguarded moments, their cruel faces glare in upon him. He knows them well. Often and often they had grappled with him and thrown him—thrown him upon his knees; and there, before the Hearer of prayer, unto whom all flesh may come when the battle is sore, he renews his strength, and finds that there is One stronger than the strong men who are too much for him—even He who establishes the mountains by His strength, and is girt about with might, and whose presence means victory and peace.

This was his battle, and it is ours. It

is the awful privilege of every man to fight his lonely fight against the mighty men of his own creation. There they are; within us, and yet, it would almost seem, without us, ringing us round and defying us to break through them into the broad place where there is liberty. They are ours, and yet they strangely seem to have taken to themselves an independent personality. They say to us mockingly, "It is thou that hast made us, and not we ourselves"; yet, after we have made them, they learn to bind us and lead us whithersoever they will, unless with prayer and courage we resist them. Every temptation unresisted, every opportunity unembraced, has the mysterious power of peopling our world with enemies who too surely go with us where we go, and dwell with us where we dwell. Stronger and stronger they grow, and we know it not, until one day they rise up to our amazement and confront us as the mighty men who are now too strong for us, and who are imperilling our soul's salvation and peace.

Every man knows his own mighty men best: pride, apathy, discontent, lust, greed, envy. But not every man knows what it is to wrestle with them. What a sad facility most of us possess for ignoring the eternal issues of this conflict, and the fearful odds that are pitted against us! We take life for a fair, when it was meant to be a battle. We do not agonize, as Christ bade us, to enter in at the strait gate. There is indeed many a soul in which a struggle long and sore is waging, that the world knows nothing of. There is many a fall and many a triumph which is hidden from all but God. But how much of strain is there in the ordinary Christian life? Are we vexed by our struggle with sin as the poor are vexed by their poverty? Or is the Christian world to-day much as it was in William Law's time, when even the lives of the better sort of people were so contrary to that strenuous temper without which religion is but a name? If it be so—and let every man judge himself as in the sight of God—if “we have not that perfection which our

present state of grace makes us capable of," it is, as Law says, "because we do not so much as intend to have it." And who that has not the intention, can call himself Christ's? In the history of the church it has been the greatest souls that have felt most overwhelmingly the fierceness of the struggle with sin; men like Bunyan, Augustine, Paul. "Oh wretched man that I am!" Life was a grim thing for the man out of whose heart that cry was wrung, as it will always be for all who echo it sincerely.

When the day is done, the great question for us all is not the amount of our work, but the quality of our struggle. Were we watching, as well as working? Was our soul well knit? Did we grapple with the mighty men? Were we wounded? Did we triumph? Or had we all the day no sense of battle, and no longing for victory? The most tragic loss that can befall any man in this world is the loss of the desire to win. Every experience, even the simplest, contains in it the elements of contest and the possibility of victory. It

may be but the speaking of a word or the partaking of a meal: we come through it either triumphant or defeated. In the test which it brought, we behaved like a good soldier of Jesus Christ, or we did not. And if this be life, is not our utmost vigilance necessary evermore? We need, like the warriors of old, to

Carve at the meal with gloves of steel,
And drink the red wine through the helmet
barred.

We need that, and more—even a consciousness of a Power above us, not ourselves, that makes for victory: or rather not a power only, but a Presence. Over against the mighty men who were too strong for him, the Psalmist saw Another who was stronger still; and it is our blessed privilege to see Him still more clearly, even as Jesus, who is not only leader, but comrade and brother. He knew a sorer fight than we. He was with wild beasts in the wilderness, and forty days He was assailed with temptations subtler and keener than we can know;

but He left His wilderness with triumph shining from His face. Let us, then, but bring this Victor into our battle; and, comforted by His fellowship and strengthened by His mighty power, we may face the mightiest men that can assail with the sure hope of victory.

Whether men judge well of thee, or
ill, thou art not other than thyself.

MISUNDERSTOOD

There is a loneliness familiar to all whose loved ones have passed irrevocably to another world: it is the loneliness of bereavement. And there is another loneliness—to some more weird and awful—the loneliness of being misunderstood. When we are judged by those who do not know us, when our kindness is regarded as the calculation of policy, when our speech or our silence is believed to be the veil behind which we hide our real opinion, when our motives are read in the light of malice or suspicion; it is then that the heart knoweth its own bitterness. There are men and women about us, yet our world is desolate. The love for which we had looked is burnt out of it by the cruel fires of uncharitable judgment. Life seems a dreary waste; it is as if there were no one left but ourselves and God. Yet the discipline of being misunderstood

may work a blessed and fruitful work upon us, if it drive us from the shallow judgments of men to the great and merciful heart of God.

Who has not looked with a shock of surprise upon the analysis of his motives by another? He listens to his well-meant words as they are scrutinized by the cunning or the prejudice of another mind. He looks at his actions as they are interpreted by another who lacks that love, sympathy, insight, imagination — call it what you will—without which no interpretation of another mind or spirit is possible. He listens and he looks with pain. For the figure with which he is confronted is not his own. The criticism which should have revealed him to himself, he knows in his heart to be a travesty — false where it is not cruel. Like a bad mirror, it has distorted the image it was meant to reflect.

When will men learn that no act and no word, no! nor a million acts or words can exhaustively represent the spirit whose expression they are? Beneath and

behind all the manifold activities through which the world learns to know us and we learn to know ourselves, is that infinite spirit of ours, which, just because it is infinite and because it is spirit, can never adequately express itself in material form. It cannot make to itself any graven image which will do it justice. And therein lies the shame, the atrocity of unconsidered and unsympathetic judgment. Who can enter into the counsels of another? There is so much that we feel and must leave unsaid; so much that we divine, but have no skill to utter. There is no act into which we can pour all our character, no deed which suggests to an outsider the infinite complexity of motive and circumstance which determined it. Every personality is like a vast harborless island. It is difficult to effect a landing upon it; and when at any point you land, you have done no more than land; the ground has all to be traversed and explored. Shall anyone then harshly judge the intricacies of another mind or character, when he does not fully understand his own?

Other men do not know the limitations under which we work. Restrictions have been imposed upon us, or we may have imposed them upon ourselves. The world does not know of them; yet its ignorance does not deter it from expressing a judgment which may bring a flush of indignation or a smile of pain across the face of the man whom its judgment has wronged. Pain there may be, but indignation there should be none, if only we have learned to commit our way unto the Lord. However high may be the seat of those who judge us, there is One that is higher than they.

Much of the pain that is caused by misunderstanding might be avoided, if men were more generous in their appreciation of each other's standpoints. The man at the foot of the hill need have no quarrel with the man who has reached its summit. It is for each to enjoy, without envy or recrimination, as much of the landscape as he can. There is one glory of the mountain and another of the valley; and let me not denounce the wider vision of another, till—perhaps with toil

and pain—I, too, have climbed the steep and taken my place beside him. Then, perhaps, with his vista before me, my mood will change; and if not, I shall at least know him to be my brother.

Hardly a month passes without bringing some reminder of the sheer impossibility of judging another fairly. How often, for example, do we find a man's generosity measured by the amount of his subscription to charitable causes! But who knows what another may have given, whose name appears in no subscription-list, but whose gift is written in the books of heaven? There is more in even the least complicated character than we have eyes to see. Perhaps it is a child whom his father thought wild and headstrong. He sees in him little of the tenderness of other children, and it is hard to win from him any proof of affection. Then his mother dies. And one day, long after, when he thinks he is alone, his father comes upon him on bended knee, sobbing before his mother's portrait. Ah! the father misread his boy; the mother whom

he has lost knew him better. In times when your heart was sore, have you never been comforted with the comfort of a glad surprise? Some one whom you had thought to be rough and careless looked into your eyes with a silent, piercing sympathy, took your hand with a grip that revived your faith and hope, or with his own rough hand laid a flower upon the grave.

There are two consolations of which the victim of misunderstanding need never suffer himself to be robbed: his honour and his God. Opinion changes, the world passes. But God abides; He never faileth. And again, no pressure of misunderstanding can essentially affect the facts of our case. We are what we are, not what we are said to be; and whatever others may say, he that was worthy will be worthy still. In the words of one who knew the human heart as few have known it: "Let not thy peace depend upon the tongues of men; for whether they judge well of thee, or ill, thou art not on that account other than thyself."

Enter into thy chamber and shut thy
door.

WITHIN CLOSED DOORS

When Christ told His disciples to enter into their inner chamber and shut the door, He was not so much urging them to a virtue as warning them against a vice—against the vice of hypocrisy in the deep things of religion. The religion of that day was fond of parading itself in the synagogues and on the streets: and where two or three are gathered together, there is always the temptation to hypocrisy. The presence of other men is a danger as well as an inspiration; and if we would know what manner of religious men we are, we have but to ask ourselves how much and how often we care to be in the inner chamber, when the door is shut. So far from courting the public gaze, we must enter upon the offices of devotion—Christ seems to say—almost as if we were doing a guilty thing, and afraid lest some one see and speak of us.

The temptation to hypocrisy, at least in its grosser forms, vanishes within the closed doors of the inner chamber. There we can afford to be fair with ourselves: and there we can hold sweet converse with the Father. But note: the door must be shut. There is something very touching in that earnest word of Christ: "Enter into thine inner chamber, and *having shut thy door*, pray." As well not pray at all as pray with the door open; for the noises of the world will enter in and drown the music of the Father's voice, and we need to be where we can hear nothing but the silence and the beating of the Eternal Heart. It is in moments like these—when other interests stand without, knocking it may be, but unanswered, and when the servant kneels in the presence of his Lord—it is then that he grasps the great realities, and convinces himself again of what, when he opens the door and crosses the threshold, he so easily forgets—that the things which are seen are temporal, and the things which are not seen are eternal.

We hear to-day that the middle wall of partition between the sacred and the secular has been broken down, that all is sacred to the man of consecrated vision. That may be so: that is so. Yet there is an inner chamber and a world outside; and there are times when we must leave the one and enter the other, and deliberately shut the door. For we need to see the Father, and tell Him how we fared by the way, and where we fell and how sorry we were.

We must see Him alone, and we must give others, too, the chance of seeing Him alone. It is nothing less than cruel to follow one into his retreat, when he has closed the door. How often, out of a mistaken affection, do we rob our dear ones of the quiet moments they so sorely need! The unspoken tragedy of many a mother's life is that her children thrust their fellowship upon her in the brief moments, all too few, when she seeks to rest her fretted heart in soothing thoughts of God and His eternity.

In the struggle without, we lose our-

selves: in the inner chamber we find ourselves again, and in its helpful silence we brace ourselves for the warfare which too surely awaits us when we leave. For leave we must. We all sustain relations to our fellows; it is in a world of living men and women that our work has to be done. It was indeed one of the saintliest of men who said that the greatest saints were wont to avoid human converse where they could. We would not say that to-day. We cannot forget that the greatest Saint of all went about among men continually. But though the cloister cannot be the whole of life, it must still be part of it. On the eve of any great crisis, the Gospels always reveal Christ in some desert place apart. As one has said, He stepped back a pace or two, like some runner about to take a great leap. Yet we often take our most daring leaps in life without stepping back, without even looking up or across or to anything but our feet.

Not only when we are tempted to make our religion a pretence by dragging

it into the glare of publicity, but in some moment every day, either when its work is done or as the spirit moves us, let the words of Christ come back upon us: "Enter into thine inner chamber and having shut the door, pray." Let us close it resolutely in the face of all that makes prayer impossible—the passions, the ambitions, the affections, the interests which would contend for the place of honour on the right hand and on the left of the God who sits throned within. For if we do not close the door, and learn to be familiar with our deeper selves and with the God who besets us behind and before, we shall find that we are closing upon ourselves slowly, but surely, another door, even the door of the kingdom of heaven. When the Bridegroom comes, and they that are ready go in with Him to the marriage, we may find that for us the door is shut.

An anchor of the soul, both sure and
steadfast.

THE ANCHOR WITHIN THE VEIL

As you journey across the often troubled and always treacherous sea of life, has it never happened to you to doubt whether it be not a shoreless sea, which will one day cruelly devour you and yours, and leave not a trace behind? Has it never happened to you to grow weary and doubtful, as you strained your eyes towards some coast land which never rose, not even in shadowy outline, out of the waters, to bless your waiting heart? Has it never seemed as if your life would drift and drift, but never into the haven where it would be? You lifted up your eyes for the welcome summit of a distant hill, but they rested only on towering billows. You would fain cast anchor, and feel sure; but the bottom is beyond your sounding.

It is this lack of sureness and satisfaction about earthly things that constitutes the opportunity of the religious man.

May there not be a smiling land somewhere beyond, though he should never see it? May he not even feel very sure that there is such a land, and see in imagination the wondrous light upon its hills, and on its shores the haven within which he will have rest forevermore? He may. For all good men who trust in Christ have an anchor both sure and steadfast, which steadies in the wildest storm; but it is an anchor fixed in the world beyond, "entering into that within the veil."

Therein lies the paradox of the voyage of life, that there is no land in which our anchor may grip, unless to the man who believes in it. The anchor is an anchor of hope, and the land is within the veil. Metaphor leaps over metaphor in the writer's desire to interpret the strange power of hope to give reality to the unseen. A divine dissatisfaction urges us on to lay brave hands upon the future, and bring its beautiful and finished work into the broken and disheartened present. Here we are in the earthly forecourts;

not far away—only a step for some of us—is the heavenly sanctuary. But there is a veil between, through which only Christ and hope have penetrated. Not the keenest mortal eye can see the beauty that lies behind the veil. No man hath seen it at any time. He could not see it and live. He cannot see it till he die. And yet to the eye of hope it is as real as any of the earthly sights which bring tears. It is more real than they. For it is eternal, and they are only for a little while.

Within the veil stands One we love, a Brother, touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because tempted and tried like as we; a Brother who is also an high priest, making intercession for us continually. He entered as Forerunner, and we, whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren, are pledged to run after, as He has run before, drawing us with cords of love; and we too like Him shall surely enter in when the Lord shall call us.

Nay, but are we not already entered in? For the bold hand of hope can rend the veil, and let the quiet splendour of

the world beyond fall upon the life that now is, and gild it with the glories of eternity. "Hope," in the beautiful words of an old Greek father, "entereth within the heavens, and maketh us already to dwell among the things that are promised, even while we are yet here below, and have not yet attained. So mighty is her power that she turns dwellers on the earth into dwellers in the heavens."

There is a power which can give substance to things hoped for, and this power receives its highest confirmation in the sight of the risen Christ, who entered into the holiest through a new and living way. With the Easter light in our eyes, and the Easter hope in our hearts, faith all but melts into sight, and even on earth we may already have a foretaste of the joy of being with our Forerunner in our Father's house. Why then stand trembling and despondent in the outer courts, when the hope that is ours through Christ may carry us within the veil?

Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without?

When the morning was breaking,
Jesus stood upon the shore.



THE VOICE FROM THE SHORE

One day, after the sun had set, seven fishermen pushed out from the shore. Look at them well, for no common men are they: Peter the bold, Thomas the questioner, Nathanael the guileless, two sons of thunder, and two others—apt types of the varied gifts and powers through which the kingdom is to come. The history of the world is hanging upon what these men will do. They have companied with Jesus. They have seen visions; they are dreaming dreams. But as yet they are only fishermen; for their hour is not yet come.

All that night they catch nothing. The night melts into the early morning, and then, in the solemn break of dawn, Jesus stood upon the shore. In upon their failure came this heavenly presence, and stood where they could all see Him

—for they were near the shore—and their faces might, we think, have lit with joy, as they forgot their fish, and steered to where the Master stood. But no! The disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Was He, then, so changed? If changed, He was, at any rate, not arrayed in robes of dazzling glory; for they mistook Him for a common man, anxious to buy their fish. He comes to His weary disciples as a man and a brother, and they know Him not. It disappoints, it vexes us.

“Children,” or “lads,” He says, “have ye caught anything?”—for that is the meaning of His words; and sadly enough they answer, “No”; not “No, Master,” or “No, Lord”; for they do not yet know that it is the Lord. They had toiled all the sleepless night, and had caught nothing, not even a glimpse of the real import of this Stranger upon the shore. “Cast your nets, then,” said the Stranger, “to the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.” They obeyed; they cast, and caught more fish than they could drag in the net. Then it flashed upon John who

the Stranger was. Was it that he detected the old note of authority? Or did he catch some echoes of those tones he had never hoped to hear on earth again? However it was, half under his breath, and with a rush of solemn joy, he said, "It is the Lord." Peter has not the clear insight of John. To him the good news is as yet but hearsay. But he can trust John's word and act upon it. So, when he *heard* that it was the Lord, he girt on his coat, and making up in energy what he lacked in insight, he swiftly cast himself into the sea. The others turned the boat's head toward Jesus, and with less precipitation, but not less gladness, came slowly on, dragging their net of fishes.

How weird is this scene, as it lies before us in the grey light of the early morning! There is Jesus standing on the shore; there is a man who has plunged into the cold water, if by any means he may hear Him first; and there are other six, slowly making their way toward Him. And how deep is this scene in its symbolic truth! These men in that boat

are but a prophecy of all deep-hearted, earnest men. As soon as they see that simple, quiet, gracious figure on the shore, they turn towards it, and some with a plunge, and others dragging their net, find their way to Jesus.

Nor can any such be disappointed. He anticipates the needs of all who come to Him. Those sleepy, hungry men see a fire of coal, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Then comes His gracious invitation: "Come and break your fast." Ah! the disciples know that this is no common stranger. Those are tones both of love and authority. The hands that distribute the bread and fish are wounded hands. And none of the disciples durst ask Him: Who art Thou? They are sure of Him now. They know His way. There is none like Him. They knew that it was the Lord.

Oh! the pathos of the lives that fail, prefigured by those toiling men upon the lake. Out upon a troubled sea, working, it may be, deep into the night, even into the grey dawn, toiling long and catching

nothing—such are some of us. And when in some quiet mood in the late night, or the early morning, a voice comes sounding across the waves, “Have ye any meat? have ye caught anything?” all we can say is “No.” Our souls are weary and hungry, and we have nothing to eat. Now why should this be so, when all the time there is One standing upon the shore, longing to tell us where to cast our nets? We think we know well enough how to look after those nets of ours, yet we catch nothing, because we do not have a glimpse of that blessed Presence watching patiently, not very far away, to attract our foolish eyes. It is this that makes the difference between life and life. One man sees Jesus, another sees Him not. Not to see Him is to fail, to toil for years and catch nothing. To see Him is to triumph.

Notice, too, to what manner of men He comes. These men were doing the humble work of fishermen, when they were spoken to by that dear voice from the shore. Jesus will come and speak to any

man, whatever his calling, so be that he is not afraid, if need be, of working long amid darkness and loneliness and storms. And He came to those men just when they had failed. They had toiled all the night, and had caught nothing. Then, when in the morning light their failure was plain, it was then that Jesus stood suddenly upon the shore. They did not know it; but that was their fault, not His. He was there, if they had seen Him. So for all the sons of disappointment, if their work has but been brave, Jesus has His word of cheer. Let us listen, when He says "cast"; let us cast where He bids us; and then, when our net is full to breaking, we will know with John, that this can be none other than the Lord. We will turn our boat's head toward Him, and make for the steady shore where He is standing. By His fire we may warm ourselves again; round His table we may break our fast. Is it for love that we hunger, or righteousness or godlikeness, or heavenly fellowship? "Come hither," He says, "to me, and break your fast."

Jesus is now ascended above the heavens, and to-day He calls from another shore to men who are tossing and weary and hungering after immortality. If we but turn and make our lives set toward Him, we shall assuredly one day reach Him, and stand with Him upon that eternal shore. He will gather us round His hospitable table; He will feed and refresh us, and our cup will run over.

When ye see these things, be sure
that He is near.

THE SUMMER IS NIGH

The air is trembling with the prophecy of summer. Any day you may see the buds burst; you may almost watch them grow from hour to hour. Hope and joy and dawning life are everywhere around, heralds of a better day to be. Winter has changed to spring, and spring, we know, will change to summer. We know: because we have faith in the march of the seasons, in the reliability of the natural order established by God. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, shall not cease.

Now the writers of the Bible loved the fair world which their God had made, and in which He had set them. They saw deep into the glory of the heavens above and the earth beneath. Their hearts thrilled in glad response to the changing majesty of the seasons. But

almost more than by their loveliness they were smitten by their inexorableness. To us the melting of spring into summer brings thoughts of hope; to them, to many of them, it bore a message of sternness, and most of all to Christ. Our poor hearts need all the gladness that summer thoughts can pour into them. "Light again, leaf again, life again, love again." For "summer is coming." But far other were the thoughts of our Lord, as He looked upon the fig tree in the glad springtime. "When her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh." But that was not all. That gracious image was but a parable of the moral order, whose sternness rang the knell of that sinful generation. For doom follows sin as surely as summer spring. The bursting of the bud was prophetic of the rich glory of summer; to look upon the one was to be sure of the other, yet all unseen. "*Even so ye also, when ye see these things coming to pass, know that He is nigh, even at the doors.*"

"He" or "it," as the margin of the Revised Version has it. Which is the more terrible?—that awful doom, which would swiftly and surely crash about those wicked heads, unmask their hypocrisies and lay their false glory in the dust; or the Son of Man Himself, now come in judgment, His gracious face turned in sternness on the men His love had failed to win? Either way, the spring air was laden with a bitter doom, which would burst in judgments of thunder from the summer heaven.

That was a message for a crisis in the national career. It wakes into life again with the birth of every leaf; and it should move us all to sober thought in view of the summer that is coming. Signs there are, plain enough for the most unlettered to read. Much of our political life is false and foul; our vision of the unseen is blurred by the lust of the eyes; our religion is a compromise with the world. There are men in the market and on the exchange, who are daily selling their souls for gold; there are youths who are nightly

imperilling, if not ruining, their fair name in the saloon and the theatre; there are matrons whose only care is to hear and see some new thing and to have their names in the public print, however insipid be the company; there are maidens whose only anxiety is for the body, what they shall put on. And the Son of Man is coming, surely as the summer, and "when ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that He is nigh, even at the doors." We know not the day nor the hour; we know only that He is nigh, even at the doors, and that He will soon be upon us in some great opportunity, which will be our ruin if it be not our salvation. And if we do not, every man of us, cleanse the hands with which we ply our trade and commerce, and purify the hearts which we lift in worship to God, He may, indeed, let us alone a little while, for He is very merciful, but at the last He will cut us down, doing unto us as He has done unto others, both in ancient and modern days.

The summer is coming. What manner

of summer shall it be? A summer in which the sun shall blaze fiercely down, and dry up the happy, roaring, torrent beds, and leave our land a withered and desolate abomination? Or a summer whose sun shall bless all life of plant or animal or man on which his genial warmth falls? The Son of Man is coming; shall He find faith upon the earth? Earnest workmen, generous employers, honest tradesmen, honorable politicians, incorruptible electors, truth-loving teachers, fearless preachers, upright administrators? When He comes, as come He will, may He find us ready and undismayed!

When Moses came down from the
mount, the skin of his face shone.

THE SHINING FACE

The summer has its tragedies. It is then that God seeks to restore our soul by bringing us into the presence of the unsullied glories of His creation, and by spreading His rich and beautiful table before us, and how often do we rise but thankless guests—nay, forgetful that we have been guests at all! Small wonder indeed that in the city a worldly heart is never visited by thoughts of other-worldliness. The city is the scene of strife and competition. There are no broad fields of green, no wide expanse of blue above us, to remind us of the great primal sanctities, and to rebuke the folly of our haste and our often too unseemly warfare. But can a man be mean in the presence of the mountains? Can he retain his sordidness and worldliness when he is standing upon holy ground? Apparently he can. Too

many can. They return from their sojourn amid God's beautiful and stately things, refreshed indeed in body, but not purified in purpose, nor rekindled to nobler hopes and aspirations.

And why? Because they have no sense of a Presence—the presence that haunts those things and moves about those scenes, as once He walked in a garden, and that speaks home to the hearts of men, as once He uttered a word which reached a man's heart and made him pause and pray. To be so near God, as many of us shall soon be, breathing His fragrant air, walking upon His mountains, sailing upon His lakes—to be so near Him, and yet to miss Him, is it not passing sad? "What is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear." But men learn that "by faith," that divine intuition which finds God everywhere and sees His angels in the flaming fire and the stormy winds.

Now the soul needs bracing as well as the body; and if she is to come back prepared to face the unknown conflict, to

meet, as meet she must, the uninspiring routine of every day, then she, too, must have her communion with God. And where can we better commune with Him than in the great silences into which He shall guide us, and in which He will bless us, if we let Him? It is written of Moses that when he came down from the mount, on which he had met and listened to God, the skin of his face shone. He did not know it, but the people did. There can be no mistaking the man who has come down from a sojourn with God on the mountain. The mountain alone could not do it, awe-inspiring as that is. Many a man will come home this summer whose face will wear the same hard smile, whose eyes will have their old calculating look; and it would be difficult enough to tell that he had been on the mountains. He has been in the palace of the King but he has not seen the King Himself. He does not know the Lord of the place. The shining face which will attract even the thoughtless gaze of the world, the quieter step, the chastened smile, can

only be his who has tarried for a while with his God upon the mountain.

It was on another mountain that Jesus was transfigured, "and his garments became glistening exceeding white, so as no fuller on earth can white them;" and when He came down He cast out devils. And for us, too, there will be devils enough to cast out, when we come down and back to the temptations with which every walk in life is too thickly strewn. But they are to be cast out only by the man who has been transfigured on the mountain top, and who has spoken with Moses and Elijah, and, above all, with his Lord. Let the majesty of the mountains and the melancholy of the sea lift up our hearts to Him who is Lord of them and of us. They are but the outer courts whence the reverent soul passes into the presence of the Eternal. How much, how unspeakably much, he loses who, as he walks by pastures green and waters of quietness, does not see in the background the gentle figure of the Lord our Shepherd!

Rest from toil is not rest from religion.
It is opportunity. His servants serve
Him day and night. "They shall be still
praising Thee." The sight of the Crea-
tor's abundant glories can only attune a
true soul to a devouter worship.

"In *His* hand are the deep places of the earth.

The heights of the mountains are *His* also.

The sea is *His*, and *He* made it.

And *His* hands formed the 'dry land.

O come, let us worship and bow down."

He brought me out into a broad place.

A BROAD PLACE

One July evening, as the sun was setting, I wandered along a narrow road that wound across a hillside of the German Harz. The road was somewhat gloomy, as trees were thickly planted on both sides, and a viper had been seen there but a day or two before. The path climbed almost imperceptibly to a point where it bent sharply to the left, and lo! there burst upon my view a scene of thrilling contrast to the narrow way by which I had come. Miles and miles of lovely land stretched right and left, and on in front, away to distant hills—all bathed in the beautiful evening light. The sense of relief, of surprise, of room and distance, after emerging from the dark and crooked way, was almost overpowering. Under the inspiration of the larger outlook, a deep and glad content came over one. Here it was possible to breathe

more freely, and to think the most hopeful things. A new sense of wonder and undreamt-of possibilities woke in the heart; and, with the narrow way behind me, and the brave smiling land before me, the verse of the Psalmist leaped into my mind: "He bringeth me out into a broad place." There, as it seemed to me, was a living picture of the difference that God makes to the life that trusts Him. Without Him, gloom, danger, and many turnings; with Him, the peace and liberty of the broad place.

"He bringeth me out into a broad place." That was a mountaineer's confession of faith. Pent within narrow passes, and not seldom pursued by relentless foes, he longed to rest his eyes upon farther reaches and wider horizons; and when he found them, they reminded him of the room and the liberty won for him by his God. How noble a confession, how simple, how profound! He, the unseen God, bringeth me, whose life is cramped and harassed, out into a broad place. And that is a confession for Christian lips no

less than for those of the ancient poet. In the light of Christ we see more clearly how broad is that place into which we are brought.

One of the deadliest enemies of the liberty and vision which should be ours is the spirit of care—that nervous anxiety which fears the days to come, and plans and schemes and frets, as if there were no Father above us. It is indeed a sombre and discouraging path along which those travel who know of no resources but those which they find in themselves. They see nothing but a step or two ahead. They fear every winding of the way beyond. They know that any moment dangerous things may cross their path.

But let Christ speak His emancipating word,

“Be not anxious for the morrow.
Behold the birds of the heaven.
Consider the lilies of the field.
Be not therefore anxious, saying,
What shall we eat, or what shall we drink?
For your heavenly Father knoweth
That ye have need of all these things.”

The faltering soul which listens and believes, is led to a height from which it can survey the vast expanses of the future with fearlessness and joy. The sky, which we had forgotten because we could not see it, stretches overhead again; a fair land lies before us as far as we can see; and the quiet light of the love of God rests over all.

And what Christ does for the victim of care, He can do for the victim of selfishness. For the path of the self-centered man is also dark and lonely. He looks upon other men but as means to his ends, and so forfeits the love of those whom he uses. He has no eye for interests beyond his own, sees in his friends nothing but instruments of his own ambition or pleasure, has no share in any of the great movements—whether social, political or religious—that lift humanity a little nearer its goal; and so he goes alone and unloved along his selfish way. He is like a waif in the centuries. He does not feel the divine thrill that runs through all the ages.

But let Christ take such an one by the hand, and bring him to a pinnacle from which he can see the far-stretching kingdom of God. Let him look with earnest eyes at the vistas that Christ opens up: a kingdom that stretches over every continent and island, a kingdom to which humanity owes her greatest gains, and within which the noblest work of our race has been done, a kingdom, too, within which the plainest man finds the monotonous tasks of his daily life consecrated and transfigured, a kingdom that endureth forever and ever. Let him look at the church of Christ, warring implacably for ages against all the forces that stain and destroy the human soul—that church which is built upon a rock and against which no power shall ever prevail, for the Master hath spoken it. Let him look until he feels how poor, how pathetic and foolish, is the little life that stands, unmoved and irresponsible, in the presence of that eternal kingdom and invincible church. It is with the largest ideas and the bravest imaginations that Christ

appeals to our better life. "Our Father who art in heaven." In all the common things that make up our life it is no less than that Father's will that is to be done, and His kingdom that is to come. By living within the inspiration of these mighty thoughts, we learn to breathe the ampler air of the heavenly places in which He dwells. Verily He bringeth us out into a broad place.

And again, the glorious sight that greeted my eyes after reaching the end of the narrow way seemed to me but a prophecy of the glory that awaits the faithful who have gone through the last valley. That, too, must be dark, and it has to be trodden alone. Few men can think of the way with joy. But Christ has robbed it of its terrors, and we may be sure that it leads to a beautiful land. The glory of God shall lighten it, and the Lamb shall be the lamp thereof; and our song there shall be, "He led me through the valley of the deep shadow, and He hath brought me out into a broad place."

When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, like them that dream were we.

LIKE THEM THAT DREAM

Not many living men to-day know much about exile. Many indeed have left their own land for another. But they have left it, for the most part, of their own free will; they have not been driven away by stress of persecution or war. Now many of the psalms, and some, too, of the greatest, will be for ever a sealed book, until we learn to understand the exile's heart, with its wild regrets and its wilder hopes. The true citizens of Zion could never be happy in the Babylon to which they had been driven. The level monotony of its plains contrasted too sadly with the glorious hills of the home land to which in imagination they often lifted up their eyes; the brilliance of its temples fell like a blight upon the hearts of men who yearned to stand within the courts of their Lord in Zion. So, when

the night of exile had passed, and the morning of redemption was breaking, there arose within those desolate hearts an overpowering gladness.

“When the Lord turned again the captivity of
Zion,

Like them that dream were we.”

Like men in a dream they crossed the weary desert that lay between them and home—the now glorious desert which had become the highway of their God. They reached the holy city and trod its ancient streets once more. They walked about it as in a dream—that dear city they had never thought to see again. Soon indeed they were to be met by more reverses and disappointment; but for the moment they could forget the sorrow that beset them behind and before, and abandon themselves to the joy of those who have come home again to the Father’s house. The Lord had done great things for them, and they were glad. For very joy they could hardly believe their eyes. It was all like a dream. We can fancy them moving wistfully about from point to

point, fearful lest they should break the spell, and then bursting into a hymn of praise, when they had assured their weary hearts that the dream was a living, throbbing fact.

Every man has his Babylon. In some kind of captivity we are all languishing—in the bondage of fear, of sorrow, of sin, or of death. The shackles are upon our soul, and the desert is between us and the land where we should be. Well is it for us, if we allow the Lord to turn our captivity, and bring us back to Zion, and bless us with that dream which the world cannot give, and which nothing but our own doubt and infidelity can take away.

There is many a redemption in our common life that dimly shadows forth the redemption which Christ is yearning to work upon our captive spirits. Worn with the stress of a long year's work, we leave it all behind us some summer day, and go away to the hills or the fields, where there is room. The soul expands into a new sense of liberty. The cares are forgotten. We feel our kinship with

the great primal things. Our spirits drink in the gladness and the redemption of it all: and the world about us seems as a dream.

Or it may be that our life has been crushed by the horror of some long suspense. We waited for a word, or a turning of circumstance, which seemed as if it would never come. At last the word was spoken, or circumstance changed; and in a moment our world was transformed. It was all as fair as a dream. The surprise passed into a rapture of gratitude, as the certainty grew upon us that the dream was fact. And after such a moment, when startled by some sudden beneficence of God, we can never be altogether pessimists any more.

Now such redemption from care or suspense is but a faint prophecy of that larger redemption and that world of more glorious dream, into which Christ will usher all who will let Him. "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." To the captive Jew, that Lord was the invisible

God: to us, the Lord is Christ. When our Lord Christ turns any captivity of ours in which we have been languishing, then we too, smitten by the splendor of the redemption which He can work, become like them that dream. Who has not been the bonds slave of weariness—not the weariness of the body only, but that deeper weariness of the mind and heart? Tired of the shibboleths of party and sect, of the negations of criticism or the perplexities of creed, of the conventional standards of society and church, seeking rest and finding none, believing in the dream-land, yet languishing in the captivities—such are some of us. Then some familiar word of Christ comes back upon us. “All ye that are weary, come unto me, and I will give you rest.” The old words light up with new meaning, tremble with new power. As in a flash, we see—and we wonder why we did not see it before—that it is to *Him* we are to come, not to party or sect, criticism or creed, society or church, but to His own dear self, and when we come, we find with glad surprise,

how easy is His yoke, and how light His burden. We are startled by the freedom which is ours in His service. When He turns again our captivity, we are like them that dream.

There is no captivity which He cannot turn. The deepest sin and the sharpest sorrow—it is all alike to Him. He is the Redeemer and He can redeem to the uttermost. We must, however, be willing to be redeemed. We must obey, when He says, "Follow." But when we hate the sin which vexes Him and turn with faith and penitence to Him, when we follow in the track marked out by His wounded feet, He will bring us into His own beautiful dreamland, in which His Father causes His sun to shine upon the erring and the broken-hearted. Pardon for sin and consolation in sorrow—your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

There is another captivity to which few, if any, have been altogether strangers. There are some who "through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to

bondage," and some time or other, every thoughtful man is captive to that fear. What is death? Who knows? Its mystery is perplexing. Its possibilities are weird. Its darkness is impenetrable. The rich man's voice could be heard across the awful gulf that separated him from Abraham; but not across that still more awful gulf that separated him from his brethren in the land of the living. And no Lazarus ever came back to them with a grim tale upon his unsealed lips. The mystery of it all must at some time strike fear into any but a reckless heart.

But in the fulness of the time there came One to deliver all those who through fear of death are all their lifetime subject to bondage. He met and vanquished that dark and cruel Power which has been the terror of millions. After His victory He passed into His shining house, and He is now standing at the door, which is never shut day or night, to welcome all who have finished their course in faith. So death is none other than the gate of heaven. How

strange and dreamlike it will seem to us, when we are delivered not only from the fear of death, but from death itself, and find ourselves citizens of the heavenly city, walking about its streets, marking its bulwarks, counting its towers, finding our lost ones, meeting the patient and mighty saints of all the generations, singing praises with the glorious company of the apostles, and the noble army of martyrs, worshipping the God who loved us and gave His son to turn our captivity. Ah! surely when the Lord thus turns the captivity of His careworn Zion, we shall be like them that dream.

They that sow in tears shall reap
with ringing cries.

THE SOWING AND THE SHEAVES

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of
Zion,

Like them that dream were we.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with a ringing cry."

But soon the laughter turned to tears, and the cry became a cry of sorrow, because the spell of the dream had been broken by hard and stubborn fact. The city to which the exiles had come back was but a mockery of their high hopes. Its ancient glories had departed. The sky above them was brazen; the earth beneath them was barren; and around them were enemies who thwarted their every plan. So they lift up their sorrowful faces and pray again.

"Turn again, O Lord, our captivity
As waters in the dry south land."

The facts had driven away the dream,

and with the dream, the joy and the glory of life had vanished. They walked about their ancient city as disillusioned men; on every street their failure stared them in the face. They looked for much, says Haggai, but behold! little. They are as men who have sown in tears, sown, too, it would seem, among the stones and thorns. If harvest there be at all, what can they look for but a few miserable sheaves—a veritable harvest of tears?

But no! a thousand times no! Not such is the faith of Israel!

“They that sow in tears
Shall reap with ringing cries.
Forth he fares weeping,
Bearing the seed to scatter,
Home he comes with ringing cries,
His arm full of sheaves.”

We thought we were listening to the wail of broken-hearted men. Now we know it to be the glad shout of triumphant faith. The faith which breathes through the sorrowful verses of the Psalm is as strong as that which throbs in its earlier part. Nay, is it not stronger? For it is

easy to send up your ringing cry, when Jehovah turns the captivity of Zion, gives you your heart's desire and brings you into the haven where you would be. But it is different when you are on the dry land, and when the seed has to be sown upon it with tears. Then nothing but faith in a kindly providence, which knows how to bless as well as tarry, can redeem the soul from sorrow and despair. Or rather it is no abstract providence, however kindly; it is the living God Himself. It is Jehovah with whom the singer pleads to turn Zion's captivity—He who will and can; for has He not turned another captivity as hopeless and terrible? The eye of faith sees the rain already descend upon the waterless ground. Through her tears, faith can see the golden harvest waving upon the now barren land, though there may be years, nay centuries, between the sowing and the sheaves. Through the silence, broken only by sobs, the ear of faith can hear the ringing shouts, as home the harvesters come, bearing their sheaves with them. So the

dream has not been forgotten after all. No man can see such sights and hear such sounds but the man who bears the dream about with him in his heart. Such a dream of Jehovah's love, such an experience of the surprises of His redemption, will inspire and glorify our common life; and if our sowing be half in tears, it will be also half in rapture.

Many a generation of pilgrims must have proved the truth of this pilgrim Psalm. It was not an easy thing for them to leave the far country, which they had made their home, and journey to the holy city. They had to go over long and often perilous ways. They had to sow in tears. But when their feet stood within the courts of the house of their Lord, and their souls thrilled with the stimulus and inspiration of the worship, they felt that they had not sown in vain. They went home glad, refreshed and strong, with their arms full of sheaves that would satisfy their hunger after God for many days to come.

Yes. Life is an uneven thing; and it

is the fewest to whom it is given to rejoice evermore. But there is a God who can turn every captivity; that is the hope and the consolation of life. Every winter shall change to spring, and every seed-time to harvest. Some day indeed tears will stand on every earnest face. The discipline of life may vex and trouble us. But it need not crush us, if we can only believe in a God who can change our fortunes and turn our captivities. "My first impressions," wrote a great missionary to the cannibal islands of the southern seas, "my first impressions drove me, I must confess, to the verge of utter dismay. On beholding these natives in their paint and nakedness and misery, my heart was as full of horror as pity." But about thirty years after, the tears had changed to laughter. "I have been to the islands again," he wrote, "since my return from Britain. The whole inhabitants of Aniwa were there to welcome me, and my procession to the old mission house was more like the triumphal march of a conqueror than that of a humble missionary. Every serv-

ice of the Church was fully sustained by native teachers."

And yet life is not always so simple. Every brave and strenuous man does not quit the scene of his activity at the head of a triumphal procession, and with cries of approbation ringing in his ears. No! many a man has been called away with tears in his eyes and sorrow in his heart. The Hebrew words of the last verse of the Psalm leave it open for us to suppose that the man who sows with tears is not also—at any rate not always—the man who comes singing home, with his arms full of sheaves. One sows, *another* reaps. The Master knew the pathos of that experience. Yet it were almost untrue to the genius of our religion to speak of that as pathos; for is not that just the end and the glory of every human life—to contribute, as it may and can, to the great far-off purpose of God? Here, in the Psalm, is a large and beautiful faith in a beneficent providence—the faith that, whether soon or late, the seed sown in weariness and tears will be brought back

as sheaves on nimble arms and with shouts of gladness. The hands that scattered the seed may not be suffered to bear home the golden grain, but it is borne home by somebody. For the laborers are God's and the harvest is God's. No seed is ever flung from any faithful hand in vain. In His good time, if not in ours, it will spring up and bear its destined fruit; and some heart, if not ours, will be glad. Yes, and ours, too; for God is as mindful of the sower as the reaper, and one day—how far away we know not—he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.

They digged in the valley and found
there a well of living water.

DEEP DIGGING

There are parts of Palestine refreshed the long, fierce summer through by springs and copious fountains, and there are other parts where springs are few and men who need water must dig for it. It was such a spot that Isaac had for a home; and child of the promise as he was, with strange visions of a splendid future in the far-off days haunting those dreamy eyes of his, he has yet to face the practical problem of finding water for thirsty men and cattle. In part, he is heir to his father's wells; for the rest, he must dig for the water he needs, dig till he finds it. "And Isaac's servants digged in the valley and found there a well of living water." How the eyes of the diggers would gleam as, almost like a human thing, the fresh, kindly water leaped up to welcome them!

Living water for living men; for men who will steadily and bravely cut their way through all difficulty and impediment to the refreshment without which their soul languisheth as in a thirsty land.

And is not Palestine, with her hills and her valleys, her dry places and her wells, the mirror of all human experience? Sometimes a thirsty tract of our own life is watered and blessed by wells which we have not digged. All unexpected, water leaps up from the hard rock at our feet, or, at the least, we have fallen heir to wells which our fathers have digged for us. But there are other tracts on which our fathers can do nothing for us, and we shall perish of thirst if we will not ourselves dig down till we reach the living water.

Every life that would be mighty must know what it is to muse. Every heart that would commune with God must throb with yearning and aspiration. There must be mysticism somewhere. But there must be more. The clear, cool water is not to be had for the wishing,

but for the digging. With faith in the ground beneath our feet we must dig down and down till the sweat stands upon our brow. Thus and only thus can we reach the water, and only thus do we deserve it. This treasure, like many another, is hidden, and will only reveal itself to the man who bends his back to dig for it.

Genius is rare; but industry, the capacity for taking infinite pains, is nearly as rare. And that is why so many lives are so sapless, so destitute of any touch of the divine. They are not refreshed by living waters, because there has been no digging. Any experience carries deep down within it something of God. But we will do nothing more than scratch the surface of it; most often, not even that. We stand lazily upon it, without piercing through it to the thing that would refresh us. We forget that if we descend to the depths, He is there. How stimulating should be the contemplation of our past as we watch it wandering, now this way, now that, but never away from God's

unslumbering care! But the days drift away. From thoughtlessness or indifference we will not descend into their meaning and purpose; and can we wonder that they deny us their inspiration? There is no living water for the man who will not dig.

How seldom is it, too, that study is a delight! No great book, least of all, Scripture, will yield up its secrets unless to the fierce persistence of the digger; for those secrets are hidden in the depths. We move airily across its chapters, when we should pause and assure ourselves that deep down are living waters, and brace ourselves resolutely to the patient search without which those waters cannot all be ours. Surface meanings are for idle souls; the more patiently and prayerfully we search the depths, the more surely and abundantly shall we find that well of water which springeth up into everlasting life.

One of Christ's parables immortalizes a man who said, "I cannot dig." And it is no accident that this man was a dishon-

est knave, who wasted his master's goods and had no sense of stewardship. But why should any man of us refuse to dig, whose hope is sustained by the promise of the Lord that he that seeketh shall surely find?

God over all, and through all, and
in all.

THE KEY OF KNOWLEDGE

Perhaps the world, like the individual, has forgotten many things it once knew: and one of those things is the paramount importance of religion. Time was when every important act of life had to receive her sanction. The unseen was felt to play about the seen, and by sacrifice or prayer it was acknowledged. But the advance of knowledge drove away the mystery it should have heightened, and the world was left devoid of wonder and of God.

Now one cannot but be struck with the Biblical attitude to knowledge. Sometimes it is depreciated, as that which puffeth up, and contrasted, to its discredit, with the love which buildeth up: it is a thing which "shall be done away." But more often it is linked with religion, and its power made to depend upon the close-

ness of this link. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, at once its foundation and its crown.

It is not because the Bible is a religious book that it so constantly combines things which the modern world as constantly strives to hold apart. It is because it is a true book, and because the men who wrote it saw deep into the meaning of things. They saw that besetting all things behind and before, was God, and that no real knowledge of the things was possible apart from the God who beset them.

The law of the Lord is perfect, not only the law of Scripture, but also those great laws which uphold and govern all men and worlds. These laws, too, like that other, "rejoice the heart" of the true student; for he finds in them revelations of a majestic presence, which is from everlasting to everlasting. It matters not whether his study be that of moral or astronomical law; every new fact will be a fresh revelation of the Infinite and Eternal, whom no one, by searching, can

find out to perfection, whose glory flashes in star and flower, in the devotion of the saint and the herosim of the martyr. "Night unto night sheweth knowledge," but to the psalmist, it was knowledge of the glory of God. "When I consider the heavens," said another psalmist, "what is man, that *Thou* art mindful of him?" His eyes saw beyond the heavens to One who made the sun and the moon and the stars also.

Imagination trembles to think to what soaring strains those deep-hearted poets of far-off days would have struck their harps, had they known the awful majesty of the universe, as science has revealed it to us to-day. How shallow is the knowledge which breeds scepticism or even indifference! A true soul that has stood even in the outer court of such a temple, can only be bowed to wonder, reverence, adoration.

The knowledge of facts without regard to the God who created and controls them, is knowledge after the flesh and not after the spirit. The materialist

should be shamed by the psalmist. Study is supposed by many to be dull; it is so only to those who do not see the world in the light of God. Belief in God as the Creator of the world, of all those facts and laws which science searches so far as it may; belief in Him as the Lord of lords, guiding history towards some far-off event, for which, in our best moments, we long with longing unspeakable: such a belief makes study of every sort an inspiration and a delight.

This sense of God is the key of knowledge, now and evermore. Most of the professional teachers of Scripture in Christ's time had taken it away from the people. They misrepresented and misinterpreted the God who was their people's glory, hiding His splendor behind multitudes of heart-breaking rules. In so doing they kept men out of the kingdom of heaven, and brought down upon their own heads a curse. So all true knowledge should bring men nearer, if not into, the kingdom of heaven; for it is a glimpse of the ineffable glory. Few men see it

often; most men never see it at all. But
oh! how we gaze in adoring silence, when
in some rare deep mood

“Our souls have sight of that immortal sea,”
and the mighty meaning of the world
rises before us: life, death, God, eternity!
Life becomes great, and study luminous
and inspiring, when accompanied by the
sense of the “one God and Father of all,
who is over all, and through all, and in
all.”

Have ye not read what David did?

HAVE YE NOT READ?

This is a question of Jesus, and like all His questions it searches and tries. It assumes that intelligent people will read; it implies that they ought to read intelligently. It was addressed to men familiar with the letter of the Old Testament, but unvisited by any gleams of its insight and inspiration. To-day it falls too often upon ears to which the words of psalm and prophecy, gospel and epistle and apocalypse are but a faded memory; and whether is it the greater crime to read and misinterpret or not to read at all? The Pharisees and Sadducees betrayed the trust committed to them by prosaic pedantry, by a loveless and unedifying literalism; and they have their successors to-day in pulpit and pew. But is not theirs the greatest treachery to the trust committed once for all to the Church of

Christ in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament who simply ignore it? Indifference is a contempt more fatal than opposition. Happier are they who have striven according to their light to possess themselves of the living oracles than they who can only hang their heads in shame when the Lord asks, "Have ye not read?"

Never was there so much reading or so many readers as to-day; and so far this is a sign to be welcomed. For men do not live by bread only, but by words of the living God and of men, the living and the dead. Mind is hungering for knowledge, and soul for rest, and they satisfy their longings with the dreams, the imaginations, the discoveries of other minds and souls. And this is right. The question of Jesus—have ye not read?—has a wider scope than that for which it was first designed. The books which His assailants might be presumed to have read were those which enshrined the noblest national thought. These books happened to be the Old Testament Scriptures: they represented the heights

to which the wisest and holiest of the people had climbed. But the principle involved is one that applies to all that is best in every national literature. On every man lies the sacred duty of acquainting himself with whatsoever things are pure and honorable and uplifting in any literature that his opportunities render accessible to him. "Have ye not read?" If not, how can ye excuse yourselves? For all around and open to the poorest are the means of dispelling ignorance, mitigating perplexity, solving doubt, sustaining resolution, kindling imagination. Literature is a trust; we must offer to all that would build us up in knowledge or goodness an unhesitating welcome. The worth of the Old Testament carried with it to the ancient Jew the obligation to familiarize himself with its contents. So every gracious thought, every ennobling impulse that books may bring imposes on us a similar obligation. Soul must commune with soul, or it will starve and die. It is not open to us to ignore any message that might illumine

or stimulate or soothe; have ye not read?

But the obligation to read comes with peculiarly binding force in the case of Holy Scripture. There, as nowhere else, are words of eternal life; words which make a man strong to endure sorrow and tribulation in this world and inspire him with hope in the world to come of life everlasting. There, as nowhere else, God meets man, and man may meet God. It lifts him to Paradise, and shows him things unspeakable, and from its pages on the lowliest life falls the quiet light of eternity. Wisdom and might are there; in the trusts and hopes which it inspires, men can bravely live and quietly and confidently die; for the issues are with God. Then have ye not read?

With the biographies of the Old Testament and certain chapters of prophecy, with the main incidents of the gospels and certain chapters of the epistles, a superficial familiarity is not uncommon; but how many golden pages, how many whole books are to most of us as if they

had never been! We solemnly profess our faith in these books as in some sense the Word of God; have we read them or have we not? How comes it that the greatest Book in the world—the Book which, apart from the tremendous significance of its message, takes the first place in the literature of the world—is the one to which least justice is done by the reading public? A novel can count upon a more patient and earnest hearing than the Book about whose verbal inspiration the most bitter controversies have been raised. The Bible is not all easy reading. There are dark things in prophecy and things “hard to be understood in the epistles of our beloved brother Paul.” But that only makes it all the more imperative that the ministry, who have been solemnly set aside to devote their time and gifts to ministering to the people in the things of God, should put their people in possession of the entire and unmutated Word of God by the exercise of all the opportunities which a devout scholarship has placed at their disposal. The

people are bound to read; their ministers or servants must be prepared to expound and to make light to arise in their darkness. If they fail there, their failure is great and grievous.

Does the enthusiasm of the older saints for a Bible which had no New Testament not shame us who live in the fulness of the times and who have seen the Lord? How often have we cried,

“The law of Jehovah is my delight,
In it I will meditate day and night.
It is more precious than gold,
Yea, than fine gold in plenty,
And sweeter than honey,
Yea, than honey that drops from the comb.”

Jesus Himself, in whose heart the perfect law was written, yet turned to the words of Old Testament Scripture for strength and comfort in His agony. In the words of a prophecy He opened and justified His gracious ministry; in the words of a psalm He commended His departing spirit into His Father's hands. The brightest and bravest faith was not independent of Scripture, nor can it ever be.

But it is possible to read and to be yet unblest. Without an open mind and heart the clearest lesson may be missed, and the most stirring example unedifying. In all our reading we must covet earnestly the power to apply; we must read with the heart and with the understanding also. "Have ye not read," said Jesus to the Sadducees, "how God spake unto Moses?" Of course they had. But not with the seeing eye; they had not seen the latent truth of immortality in the simple words, "I am the God of Abraham." "Have ye not read what David did?" said Jesus again to the Pharisees. Of course they had. But they did not see how it disarmed their objection to the innocent conduct of the hungry disciples as they plucked the ears of corn on the Sabbath day. They only saw ancient and irrelevant facts—they did not see in those facts the embodiment of principles which might illustrate and guide the life of their own day. They had got the lesson by memory, but not by heart.

Let us read, then, not merely that we

may know the truth, but that we may lay it up in our hearts and practise it in our lives. With such intelligent and prayerful reading what an inspiration biography might be! "Have ye not read *what David did?*" The wisdom of the sage, the courage of the hero, the holiness of the saint, are all for us: they will lift us out of our bondage into the liberty of the brave and free. Have ye not read what Abraham, Moses, Josiah, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul did? What Savonarola, John Knox, Wesley did? Could so much magnificent God-inspired manhood pass before us and leave us uninspired? Our poor little lives, tossed on seas of temptation and care, need some sure and anchoring word. Have ye not read what Christ did and said? If not, then are ye poor indeed, for "The words that I speak unto you," said He, "they are Spirit and they are Life."

Oh! that thou hadst known the things
that pertain to thy welfare.

THE THINGS THAT MATTER

What are they—those things that matter? For to know them is the true art of life. To pursue them earnestly, and them alone, is to be safe and calm and glad; it is to live in peace and die in hope. Life is passing, and death is coming, and the time is short, and the things that matter we must know.

Everywhere men are in deadly earnest. Purpose is written plainly upon almost every face. Keen eyes look out upon you—eyes more keen than kindly—as you pass down the busy streets. But how much of all that earnestness, purpose and vision is directed to the things that matter? Did those sharp eyes ever see beyond the grave? Did those nimble brains ever reckon with the certainties of another world, in which the prizes go not to the cleverest, but to the best?

Here surely is the amazing irony of life, that far the largest share of men's eagerness, strenuousness, enthusiasm, vigor, is spent upon the things that do not matter. We do not like to confess this to our hearts. In the clash of competition, when we are tasting the dangers and delights of the struggle, and our hearts bound at the thought even of a far-off victory, we cannot be expected to confess that the battle is a foolish one, and the victory not worth the gaining. To do that would be to paralyze the right arm. But to the value of all our struggle and purpose we may bring a very simple test: what will it do for us at the last?

Nothing is more certain than that death lies at the end of the journey called life; that within its solemn shades the noise of all our struggle shall cease. And every aim to which we sacrifice ourselves should be looked at in the light, or the darkness—if you will—of that inexorable certainty. We are studying to be rich, are we? Glad if the years see growing gains; and in the struggle we are selling

our strength, our peace, and it may be our honor. Good. But oh my soul! remember: across the threshold of death thou shalt carry neither gold, nor silver, nor goodly raiment, nor precious stones. "How much did he leave?" asked a friend of a rich man who had died. "Everything," was the answer. Everything.

Or are our hearts set on pleasure—whether the cruel pleasures that cost so dear, that waste our strength, and harden our hearts, and drag down womanhood to hell, or pleasures that are, if not so guilty, yet idle and empty? Not long ago, on an Atlantic liner, there travelled with us a theatrical troupe; and there, beneath the solemn splendor of the stars, with the silvery moonlight shimmering upon the rippling waters, they would gather on the deck and sing their empty songs. How little, methought, they cared for the things that matter: and does the public, for whom such songs are sung, care more? How foolish, how all but blasphemous, they rang amid the glories of the night, and sky, and sea! and what would they do

to prepare a man for that great day which neither the singers nor their public shall escape?

Or are we panting after the phantom of popularity? Do our foolish hearts flutter with pride, when we are much spoken of by men and women whose life is but a vapor, and do we scheme to win the good opinions of those whose hearts are as empty as our own? Ah! what will that matter, and what will it do for us, when the Judge is seated, and the Books are opened?

At the end of every hope we cherish and every scheme on which we spend our strength, lie Death and the Judgment. They are like great mountain-peaks, which no traveller can miss, who lifts up his eyes from the ground, though but for a moment. And one glance every day at those massive certainties should be enough to purify a man's purpose, sober his activity, and touch him to sympathy with things eternal. For the things which really matter now, are the things which will matter then. Would any man in his

senses deliberately pursue a purpose now, the memory of which would trouble or torment his last conscious hours? Would any man who had but the ordinary business capacity for forecasting the future and counting the cost, so live that when he appears for the final judgment, he would long for the mountains to cover him and the hills to fall upon him? It is possible for us to stand in His presence on that day, humble indeed, but unafraid: possible, however, only if all our life we have been standing in that presence, walking in His light, and talking with Him by the way, till His Spirit has passed into our spirit, and we are altogether content with the things that are well pleasing in His sight.

What are they, then, those things that matter? We do not name them, for we do not need. Every man may discover them for himself, if he will but remember that he has to appear one day before the judgment seat of Christ. Not merely appear—St. Paul means more than that—but be manifested, and seen for what he

is. The Judge will see through us—that is the meaning of the apostle—and the things that matter are the things that we may bring into that awful presence unabashed. We must so live now as we would wish to have lived then. All else matters not.

In whatsoever state, content.

THE DUTY OF CONTENT

God doeth all things well. Yet it would almost seem as if He made many a mistake, to judge by the discontent with which some men accept the discipline which He allots them. Discontent is a more terrible thing than the victim of it dreams, for it is the practical denial of the love and wisdom of God. It implies that God does not know the way by which to lead us, and it denies that He leads us in love. It is, in essence, rebellion; and whether it be the greater griefs of life or the pettier vexations of every day that bring the murmurs to our too ready lips, we deny in our hearts, though we may confess with our lips, that God is our Father and that He doeth all things well.

There is indeed a discontent which is itself a gift of God—that noble discontent

with the coldness of our response to the manifold entreaties of God's good spirit, and with the feebleness of our fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. If that be more than a passing gust of self-reproach, it may be welcomed as the flutter of a new life. There is, too, a discontent with the subtle injustices of society, which may impel us to a more brave and energetic service. But discontent with the lines in which our lot is cast—that is only possible to one who thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think. It is the offspring of an inner conceit, which leads a man to claim what he does not deserve. For what does any man deserve? When he looks out upon the severity of the great laws which he has offended, and in upon the checkered motives that stain the best of all he does, he can only confess that he is unworthy of the least of the mercies that crowd his days. Discontent is the other side of presumption. We have no right to anything but opportunity. That we need; without that we cannot grow. But

that we all have in abundance. Every day is richly sown with opportunity—the more real the vexation, the greater the opportunity to grow patient and strong. And it is on these things that the strenuous soul should be set. Strength is developed only by strain, and men are made perfect through suffering. It is not always those who are clothed in purple and fine linen that are most fit for the kingdom of God, but rather those who have to bear some cross and endure some shame or sorrow.

It becomes us, therefore, to be thankful not only for what we enjoy, but still more for what we suffer. For as there is no advantage without its temptation, neither is there any vexation, pain or sorrow, that does not hide some blessing. The great grief that breaks the heart might lead us, if we would let it, to set our affections upon a world where sorrow is no more. The disappointment which cuts long cherished plans in sunder, the pettier cares on which, little by little, we fret our hearts away, might lead us, if we

understood them, into a growing independence of the things that are without us, and teach us to seek our happiness within. We need more of the temper of the lame man who used to thank God daily for what the world would have called his misfortune; "for, had I not been lame," he would say, "I would likely have run away from God." There are natures which can suck the honey out of every flower—which can rejoice in the sunshine and be glad in the rain; and blessed are they who see the divine possibilities that God has planted within the events of their daily discipline, and most of all in that which is stern and sore.

It is there that the real treasures lie—the treasures which neither moth nor rust can corrupt—there, and not in the material things on which so many spend their money and their strength. Of those things some one has said that, when the longing for them rises in our hearts, we should ask, not whether we need them, but whether we can dispense with them. That is only partly true. Life is not nec-

essarily any the fairer when it is stripped of all that money can buy.

“Even in a palace life may be led well.”

But though it is true that the noble life may use those things nobly, it does not need them. The fairest life among the sons of men was lived by One who had not where to lay His head. After all, is not all that is really great, deep, and essential in life, within the reach of everybody: the wonders of the sky above us, the wise words of all the ages, the inspiration of a rooted friendship, the dear joys of home, the romance of love, the instinct of worship, the memory of happy days, the means of grace and the hope of glory?

And the greatest of all is this, that in whatsoever state we are, there is the ever-present opportunity to do the will of God; and shall we not therewith be content? The sunshine that plays on many a face that has looked long on sorrow, streams from the consciousness of an inviolable union with God, and humble adoration of His blessed will. Have we

not often been put to shame—we who have all that we need and infinitely more than we deserve—by the sight of the peace that has transfigured the face of some poor suffering one, doomed never again to see more of God's world than she could see from the window of the room where, for weary years, she has been lying in pain? She sees the heavens opened, and she is content. The deepest joys that the soul can know come to him who is content to do the Father's will, even when that means weariness and hope deferred.

“Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with death and shame.”

Such was the Master, and such must be all who love Him.

Content: “For *He* hath said, ‘I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.’” He who cannot lie, He to whom belongeth the earth and the fulness thereof, He whose are the issues of life and death, He whose power is as wide as His pity, He hath said, with a reassurance that thrills

with divine passion, as if He could not too earnestly persuade the doubting hearts of men,

“I will in no wise fail thee,
Neither will I in any wise forsake thee.”

So we cannot be where He is not. In every disappointment we may have the companionship of the most high God. In all the anxiety with which our hearts throb as we think of dark and difficult days to come, we may take to ourselves the assurance that there is a Father in Heaven who cares, and whose love will never depart. And shall we not let that sublime assurance from the mouth of God Himself, lift us above all fretting and discontent into that peace which the world cannot take away?

Afterward Thou wilt receive me to
glory.

THE GREAT ELSEWHERE

Christ promised Himself much from the hereafter. He knew that the cross was the end of His earthly ministry. Yet He was calm amid treachery and cruelty; for He knew that that cross was not the end. Beyond it lay the heavenly glory.

Behold Him! Rejected, despised, defeated, alone, but with soul unshaken: for the future was His. Beyond the horror of the thick darkness He saw "the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."

So to every soul that is sure of God, defeat is but the prelude to power and glory.

"My feet were almost gone," sang one,

"My steps had well nigh slipped."

His heart was vexed and embittered by the dark riddle of life; till it came upon him with a flash, in one of those deep

moments that come to all men who wait for them, that God was his, and he was God's forever. His fears melted before the presence of the God who was continually with him, and before the vision of the glory that would follow when He took him.

"Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee,
According to Thy purpose Thou wilt guide me,
And afterward receive me to glory."

Probably as many hearts are broken by defeat as by sorrow; and for the one, as for the other, a new day dawns as soon as a glimpse is caught of that larger life which awaits us in the great elsewhere. Life is full of unheeded tragedy. Many a man has been visited by dreams of great service. He has kept his secret to himself; but he knew that, if he had the chance, he had the power. He has felt within him the throb of a high purpose. His soul has been stirred by that divine unrest which urges all resolute natures to press on to the things which are before. He has only waited for his opportunity—

waited for weary years; and the opportunity never came.

Opportunities, they tell us, are always coming; it is for us to open our eyes and stretch out our hands and grasp them. No doubt in one sense every day is a long procession of opportunities. The man of resolution and vision knows how to transmute all the baser metals of his common life into gold; and his life will be the richer for all that it touches. Yet the opportunity for which he has hoped and wrestled, that turn of affairs which would, he thinks, have given him his place and power among men, never came. The dream remained a dream; and the man walks his way through the lonely years with a dull pain at the heart of him. Unless sorrow has chastened him, he wonders, in his bitterer moods, why it should be so.

How many lives, bursting with energy and hope, have suppressed themselves for the sake of other lives which were dearer to them than their own, or have been suppressed by the stroke of poverty

or disease! One who had it in him to be a philosopher, an artist, a poet, is known as the village shoemaker. Perhaps his father was poor. Perhaps his parents were dead, and the care of his brothers and sisters fell on him, and blotted out his earthly chances. And so he never learned to translate his beautiful dream into language which might have helped or thrilled another. Or was he a man of rich, fine culture and sickness shut him out of the great world in which he had hoped to use with joy the power that had come to him in strenuous hours of preparation? He scented the battle afar off, and he is doomed in loneliness to listen to the clash of other men's arms. Or was it some girl, who longed to serve her Lord in a foreign land? But her parents said no! and her heart is sore.

Why did God make us with those high hopes? Why do we see those visions and dream those dreams? Why do we thrill with those impulses to wider action, if the end is to be pain, defeat, and death? Is it not because afterwards He means to

receive us to glory? A great German preacher tells of a farmer's son who had a genius for engineering. His father kept him on the farm and would not let him study. "But is it not a grievous pity," some one said, "that such a talent should be lost?" "Lost!" said the father, "he will use it in heaven."

Yes, the best is yet to be. Our hopes are not balked for nothing. Our defeated ambitions and unrealized yearnings can do more than teach us submission. They can wake in us thoughts of a larger life and a more generous world, where the powers with which God gifted us can be used without impediment, and the opportunity for which we waited, will come. The God who made the dream will fulfil it, if not here, then elsewhere. For He abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

But is not Heaven rest? says some weary one. Yes; the rest of joyous unimpeded service, the rest of those who serve Him day and night, the rest of those who run and are not weary, who walk

and are not faint. The soul which has been crowded out of her proper place by ruthless circumstance or angry competition, will breathe freely in that ampler air. There will be no jostling on the streets of the city of God. In company with the great multitude which has tasted the sorrow of defeat, we shall walk about the fields of light. What here we have yearned for, there we shall enjoy. What here we have dreamed, there we shall dare and do, in endless unconstrained service, advancing from knowledge to knowledge, and from glory to glory.

Thou art mindful of him, and Thou
visitest him.

MINDFUL OF HIM

"Thou art mindful of him, and Thou visitest him." It may have been a shepherd that uttered the wonder of his heart in these words, as night after night he watched the splendors of the sky which the fingers of his God had framed, and was led by them to thoughts of the all but immeasurable distance that severed his God from himself. He was so little, and God and His heavens were so great. Could such an one as God care for such an one as he?

One night the sense of his insignificance in the light of the transcendent glory that blazed above him, yielded, as at a touch of the Almighty hand, to a strange uplifting gladness that he was greater than those heavens above him; for he could look up and call their maker Lord, while they could only offer Him

their silent and unconscious homage. He was a worshipper; they were but witnesses. They witnessed, because they must; he worshipped, because he would. By virtue of his mysterious nature he was at once servant and lord; possessed of a will whose glory was to bow in reverent adoration before Him whose name was excellent in all the earth, and yet whose duty and destiny was to bend to its behests all the works of God's hands. With awe it came upon him that there was in him something of the divine nature. He saw in himself the image and reflection of God, whose glory flames from sun and star. He could enter into fellowship with their Creator; he could say, as they could not, "Oh, Jehovah, our Lord." And God had put all things under his feet. He was lord, as God was Lord.

But is man lord? The largeness of the Psalmist's faith in man is fully justified only by the perfect humanity of Christ. He is Lord, and beside Him there is none else. Every year is confirming in ways

that are all but fabulous, man's lordship over things material; over the sheep and oxen, fowl and fish, land and sea. Even the lightning obeys him, and the stars reveal to him their secrets. Yet there is a realm he has yet to win; he is not master of himself.

We look back upon centuries of comparative moral failure; upon arid speculations, which have not made man more upright, or God more probable, or more lovely, upon religions which have carried in their train massacre, torture, idolatry, and immorality. History, every human life, proclaims sadly enough that man is not lord, but the veriest slave—slave of passion, habit, tradition.

But among the sons of men there has been, nay, there is, one Lord, even Jesus. Not among the sheep and oxen do we see any lordship worthy of the name. We have to lift up our eyes to

“That bright place beyond the skies
Where Thou, eternal Light of Light,
Art Lord of all.”

It is no man but Jesus, not even the

Jesus who walked on earth, but the risen Christ who said: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth"—all sheep and oxen, beasts and birds and fish, yea, and the immortal souls of men. "Now we see not yet all things subjected to Him. But we behold Jesus crowned with glory and honor." The psalm is an unconscious prophecy of Christ, who alone enjoys perfect undisputed sovereignty, and who alone can restore to man the dominion he has forfeited through sin. "All things are ours," not of right, but because "we are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Only Christ the Lord can make us truly lords, and lift us into fellowship with that God whose nature we were born to share. Through Him we enter into the secret of God, and learn that His nature and His name is love. In Him we see a thousandfold more plainly than the midnight stars could suggest to us that "Thou art mindful of man and Thou visitest him," for it was in Christ that He did in very truth visit us and show us

His pitiful heart and His mindfulness of us.

And when this precious gift came down from heaven upon our weary earth, we can almost fancy we hear the shepherds, who were abiding in the field, and keeping watch over their flock by night, responding to the angelic song in the words of that older shepherd,

“Oh Jehovah, our Lord,
How excellent is Thy name in all the earth.
For what is man, that Thou art mindful of
him?

And the son of man, that Thou visitest him
With the gift of Thy well beloved Son?”

Ob! my people, remember.

THE PLACE OF MEMORY

"A man with a bad memory," said Richard Rothe, "is literally a poor man." Does not this utterance find only too sad an echo within all our hearts? At no time are we complete masters of the resources that once were ours. We have forgotten as much as we have learned, perhaps more. We search in vain for a fact which was once familiar, and it may lie forgotten till that great day when all things will be brought to our remembrance. What would we not give to recall a line of the song our mother sang a hundred times, or to live over again the joy with which we listened to a forgotten story in the long ago? We made no effort to hold these things. They have slipped through the too loose meshes of the memory, and we are the poorer for their passing. We look across our experience of the years,

and much that should be in blossom is waste. Our garden has become a wilderness.

The loss of the facts which once instructed or the emotions which once thrilled us, is tragic enough; but it is as nothing to the vanishing of those experiences through which, in days gone by, God laid His hand upon our soul. Sometimes He visited us in the summer peace of the woods or the mountains. Sometimes He came when our life lay bleeding and torn in the battle of the city. But whether here or there, there have been times when we were sure that the great Presence was very near; and he who can forget these times is poor indeed. Again and again we have had to pause and look at the strange writing on our life's page. Again and again we have had to say, "This is the finger of God." But the awe that was upon us as we gazed has long since gone away, and left us the dull creatures of the daily round, with eyes that are now blind, and hearts that are hardened to the divine goodness of which

our past contains so many a flaming symbol. Well might an ancient psalmist plead,

“Oh that ye would hearken to His voice to-day!
Harden not your heart, as in the wilderness.”

The past was ringing with voices for those who had ears to hear—voices of tender pity, and voices of the sternest warning. The bones of a rebellious generation had bleached the wilderness. But there were hearts then, as there are to-day, which not even so tragic a memory could discipline and humble.

The Bible presses a continuous appeal to remember and forget not. The prophets and psalmists knew how much depended upon a good memory, how full the past was of inspiration and of warning, and how much men needed to look and listen. “O my people! remember,” pled Micah. Human nature is ever the same, and the prophetic appeal to remember can never be out of date. Our bad memory explains many a lapse in the Christian life. If we had forgotten less, we should have served more and better.

But, with strangely fatal ease, men can forget alike their terrors and their deliverances.

Sit down then in some quiet hour, and think of all His benefits. Once you were hemmed round with great perplexity. There was distress on every side. The darkness was about you, and you knew not which way to turn. Some gaunt figure blocked your way,—sickness, sorrow, poverty, defeat. And you yearned and you prayed in mute anguish that, if God would deliver you from your distress, create for you a new opportunity, and bring you out into a broad place, you would serve Him with earnest and grateful love all your days. And your prayer was heard. The clouds lifted. The way was clear, and you are walking on that way to-day with ease and pleasure. But is your service as pure and zealous as you had vowed in the hour of your distress that it should be? Have the old terror and the old gladness ever shaken your soul again? Have you remembered, or have you forgotten?

Think again. Once you were assailed

with fierce temptation. It was more than half your fault that you were where you could be tempted. You did not pray for power to resist. Did you, in your heart of hearts, even wish to resist? At any rate, you fell, and then the whole horror of it flashed upon you. How paltry was the gain, and how tragic the loss! And you lifted up your face with shame to heaven, and sobbed out the prayer, "Bless me, even me also, my Father." You believed sincerely enough that that moment would humble you forever in your own sight. But you have taken care to keep the memory of it far from you. It is the unclean thing which you have skilfully buried out of sight. But, oh! my brother, remember. Do not be afraid to recall the hour of your shame. It will teach you again your unutterable weakness and your unutterable need of God. It will bring home to you again the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It will cause you to judge your fellows with charity, and to walk with humility before your God.

The memory must be cultivated, or the

progress will be slow indeed. We dare not forget all His benefits. We cannot forget any of His benefits without being so much the poorer. The more we forget, the more we lose in power and enthusiasm. Every man has in the yesterday of his life some sacred spot at which he can rekindle his faith and gratitude, if only he revisits it. We cannot do without our past. It is full of stimulus and warning. It is fitted both to encourage our faith and to lead us to repentance. When Peter remembered the words of the Lord, he wept bitterly; for memory can lead to contrition, and contrition to renewal. But if we stifle the memory of those words which God has spoken to us in moments of temptation, danger, or trial, we commit the deadliest crime against our own soul; for we harden our hearts and close upon ourselves the open doors of heaven.

And yet we are so made that we cannot altogether forget. Sometimes the past looks in upon us. It does not forget us, though we forget it. The thing we

had forgotten flashes across the years like lightning, and illumines for one lurid moment the hardness and ingratitude of our hearts. In that light let us look at ourselves, for God is giving us another chance to consider and repent. But, if we do not encourage the past to visit and instruct us, it will visit us when it is too late, and when its presence can only mock and terrify, for we read of one who lifted up his eyes in torment, and prayed but for a drop of water, and across the great gulf fixed came the awful answer, "Son, remember!"

Behold! I stand at the door, and
knock.

THE STRANGER AT THE DOOR

No man can be very far from the Saviour. He is either in my house or standing before my door. If He is not yet my guest, He yearns to be; and between Him and me there can be no more than a door, though that door may be bolted and barred. "Behold!" He says; and over the mystery that follows this arresting word, let me not too lightly hasten. "Behold! I stand at the door and knock." Oh miracle of inhospitality! That I should sit, careless and comfortable, within my house, and have no ears for the knocking of that Stranger without the door.

This tender message was first spoken to a luke-warm church, which thought she was wise and wealthy and had need of nothing. But one thing she needed sorely, even the Saviour whom she kept

standing at the door. Any church which would think to dispense with Him, must indeed be "wretched and miserable and poor and blind," and she may have to be woke up from the slumber that glides into death by a loud knock at her inhospitable doors. For the Stranger of whose rights she is so careless, loves her with all the passion of His Saviour heart, and He will try to knock so that she will not fail to hear. A solemn knock it may be, as a stroke of pain or sorrow; for "as many as I love, I reprove and chasten." That is how He often knocks at doors which do not gladly open to His coming.

And as with the church, so with the man. Prosperous and lazily content with the warm but delusive comfort within, we close our doors against that gracious Wayfarer, whose delight is to dwell among men and to find a home among those whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren. He cannot pass us by. His heart is too full. Our closed door may grieve His love, but it cannot paralyze it. He longs to be within. He be-

lieves—such is His faith in man—that if He knocks, it will be opened unto Him. So He knocks as on earth He may have knocked, when the night came on, at the door of some fisherman's house on the shores of that memorable sea where many of His mighty works were done. He knocks and waits and listens with beating heart, to see if we will let Him in.

But if He loves me so, why does He not lift the latch and come in? Ah! perhaps He cannot. Perhaps I have barred out such as He. And besides, this is a door which can be opened only from within. If I do not open it, He cannot; and so gentle a Stranger will not force the door. The perilous privilege of hospitality is mine. It is mine to welcome or reject the kingliest Stranger that ever came to human door.

And if His knock be unrecognized or unheard amid the household noise within, surely I will know His voice; for He knows that only the door hides me from Him, and He speaks as well as knocks; for He believes that I can be

touched by the pity and the love that melt in the tones of His dear voice. "It is I," He tells me, half pleadingly, half reassuringly, "and if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me." Can it be that any man would not listen to such a voice, and open his door with gladness? He longs, He pleads for a place at my table. Is it true? "I with Him, and He with me." This humbleness, this brotherliness, rebuke me, amaze me. Then with a flash the whole scene is transformed, and I see it with other eyes. "He with me," says Christ. So after all, He is host, and I am guest. It is He who prepareth the table and it is of His good things that I partake.

To the man who loves the Lord, life might be one long festival with Christ. No man need sup in loneliness. The Master is willing to share all with him, though it be in an upper room; but only if he open the door and let Him in. It is for us to have the open ear, to learn and understand the many ways in which

Christ knocks and speaks to men. Every stroke that falls upon our health or fortune, every breach that death makes among our friendships, is as another knock of the Christ who is yearning to enter our life, to possess, redeem and transfigure. But He can gently speak as well as loudly knock; and happy is the man who has ears to hear. In every gracious thought that visits us, in every yearning after better things, in every solemn resolution for the days to come, in every tender memory of days gone by, Christ is standing before our door saying "It is I." Christmastide is one brief, tender, manifold appeal. You cannot escape it. It speaks to you from the glad eyes of the children. It whispers from the glittering heavily laden trees in many a home and church. It throbs in the gift that friend sends friend. It rings in the carols on the streets and in the churches. The air is charged with a thousand gracious memories. What is it all but the audible voice of Christ? He is standing at my door and knocking.

Lord, I hear Thy voice; come in and
sup with me, and abide with me evermore
—Thou with me and I with Thee.

One step enough for me.

ONE STEP ENOUGH

Our times are in His hand: to-morrow no less than to-day, to-day no less than to-morrow. It were unworthy, then, to look across the coming year with fear or hesitation, as if its unknown ways had to be trodden alone, as if there were no Father to care for us, or Saviour to plead for us, or Spirit to comfort us.

But we love best to walk by sight, and not by faith. We would not be treated as a child, and guided where we go. We would rather plan our way, and strain our eyes towards the far distances—those foolish eyes which cannot see even the nearest bend of the road. We set out for Damascus with letters from the high priest; but we are struck down, and the letters are never delivered. We are rudely stopped in our way, like the Cyrenian, and compelled, with the cross

of Christ upon our shoulders, to march with Him towards Calvary. We cannot see a step of our way. Clouds and thick darkness are about it. What can we do but trust? If we cannot trust, then we shall have to fret and scheme; and it will be all over with our peace, to say nothing of our joy.

But if we would reassure our restless hearts that our future is in the hands of God, we have but to scan our past. Can any man that is not altogether blind look over the way he has traversed without surprise and awe, as he sees it marked everywhere by mysterious foot-prints other than his own—even the foot-prints of the living God? We thought we were going a way of our own; and all the time we have been on the King's highway. Another has been walking with us, though our eyes were holden and we saw Him not, and many a time He has turned our steps to the right hand or to the left, into His way which was not our way. How strange seem our early dreams and purposes in the light of life's later story.

The longest way must be traversed a step at a time, and if we faint at the thought of life's long, and maybe perilous way, may we not at any rate brace our faith to take the single step which here and now is needed? The way is dark: but the darkness and the light are both alike to Him. There is solid ground beneath our feet. He hath beset us behind. Will He not also beset us before? Commit thy way, then, unto the Lord. With the grand imperiousness of love, Christ continually presses upon us the large and awful claims of the future; but He presses no less earnestly upon us the necessity of quietly and confidently trusting the Father's goodness from day to day. We are to take no anxious thought for the morrow, which we may never see. It is for each day's bread that we are taught to pray. And the greatest hymn of the Christian church teaches us to lift our hearts to God with the prayer: "Vouchsafe, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin."

If we could wake with the thought that

this new-born day is as divine as any day ever was or can be, with what quiet joy would we move on to all its duties and cares! The cares and duties that lie beyond the coming night will be illumined by the kindly light of another day. Each new day will be another day with God, and so we can abide any issue with patience and with hope: for the issues are with Him.

“I do not ask to see the distant scene,
One step enough for me.”

The mist may be heavy that lies upon the landscape; but the way we know. Christ has made that plain enough to the willing heart. It is the way of obedience to the Father's blessed will. Therefore we will step fearlessly forward through every night of doubt and care and sorrow, in the sure hope of an everlasting day. Our earthly days are but as steps

“That slope thro' darkness up to God.”

OCT 14 1903

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: Nov. 2005

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